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THE PHILOSOPHY OF DON HASDAI CRESCAS

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CHAPTER V

PROVIDENCE AND FREE WILL.

CRESCAS posits that the providence of God extends also to particulars, yet it is not entirely uniform. It presents rather a kind of graded scale. It is in some aspects generic and universal, and in some way individual. The general is again subdivided into a more general order where the system is natural law without any particular attention to the perfection of the species or individual included, and into a special kind where the perfection of the unit is in some way taken into consideration. Again, the individual providence, though not in the form of natural law and a kind of special, yet admits of division. There is some kind in which the perfection of the provided individuals is completely taken into view, and some kind in which the relation of Providence to the provided is not so absolute in regard to their perfection. Crescas goes on to exemplify his division. The general Providence is seen in every existing being, in its composition, natural tendencies, organic functions, mental powers, and so forth. Although these forces vary according to the genus and the species, they are alike in every individual of the species ; we see, therefore, that natural laws are taken in as a part of Providence. The human species is an example of general

and special Providence, since it is endowed with reason. It is general, for every individual participates in it alike, but special at the same time as it is only for that species alone. Thus he goes on to unnecessary details. The particular Providence, in his conception, consists in the spiritual reward and punishment, for the following of an ethical and religious life or the opposite. This kind of Providence is in complete relation to the degrees of perfection of the various individuals, and it is arranged and determined by God's eternal will.¹⁸⁵ We observe here already a departure from the theories of the Jewish Aristotelians who emphasized the intellect as a means for special providence,¹⁸⁶ and asserted that the higher man ascends in the scale of intelligence the greater claim he has upon God's special interest. Crescas, on the other hand, asserts the practical and ethical value over the intellectual.¹⁸⁷

The problem of injustice in this world is taken up next by Crescas. It was always a stumbling-block to religious thinkers, and various solutions have been offered for its removal. Of these Crescas quotes several. The first is the Maimonidian, which denies the existence of the problem either by doubting the subject, namely, whether the righteous is really righteous or only apparently so, or by questioning the predicate, saying that the evil of the righteous is for the purpose of the good, and the good of the wicked for the purpose of evil.¹⁸⁸ Both possibilities are objected to

¹⁸⁵ והוּא מִבְאוֹר הַיּוֹת הַחֲשָׁנָה זוֹאת מִסּוּדָרָה וּמִנוּגָּל בְּרוּצָיוּן הַקְּדוּם, *Or Adonai*, p. 35 a. קְדוּם here is to be taken rather as eternal than pre-destined. Crescas uses the word often in the sense of eternal.

¹⁸⁶ See above, chapter III. Ibn Daud, and cp. also Maimonides on this point.

¹⁸⁷ *Or Adonai*, p. 35 a.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35 b.

by Crescas. The fact is that we observe at times that evil befalls a man when he acts righteously, and again when the same man turns to the wrong path he succeeds. This turn of events gives the case a problematic status, for whatever the man really is, not apparently, the results ought at least to follow in opposite directions. On the other hand, the denial of the predicate is contravened by fact, for we find many evils that befall the righteous with no purpose for the good, and the opposite.

Again, the solution of the quasi-Aristotelians, which is rather Neo-Platonic, that evil has its origin in matter and has little to do with God, is not satisfactory, for that simply leads to admit a shrinkage of God's power. Gersonides tried to solve this question in a peculiar manner.¹⁸⁹ Providence follows the intellectual scale. Man through his reason and potential unity with the active reason stands in a certain relation to God. The more man develops his mental powers the nearer he comes to God, and so is said to be under special Providence. On the other hand, the one that neglects the cultivation of the intellect is forsaken. The purpose of the special Providence is to provide the deserving with adequate causes to obtain the good. However, exceptions to the rule occur very often, and the cause of these exceptions is the influence of the spheres. The wicked sometimes prosper because of a certain sidereal arrangement. Again, the suffering of the righteous may be explained through other causes also. As for the influence of the spheres, though in particular cases it may be unjust, yet taken as a whole it tends for the good, preservation of the existence,

¹⁸⁹ Crescas refers to Gersonides by the term 'מקצת חכמיינו' 'some of our sages', *Or Adonai*, p. 35 b.

and general good. In this way they tried to solve the problem of injustice as well as the question of evil, how they can be related to God. The evil is severed from the direct connexion with God. It befalls man when forsaken to the natural order, caused by sidereal or spherical influence.¹⁹⁰

This confused theory is justly rejected, for according to it the main emphasis is laid upon contemplation, and a man can be as wicked as possible, yet by virtue of his philosophical attainments be entitled to special Providence, which is contrary to every religious principle. Again, the undue influence of the spheres causes shrinkage in Divine providence. Crescas, therefore, propounds his own solution. It is actuated by a deep religious motive, but at the same time by an exalted feeling which may compare in depth to the Kantian theory of ethical autonomy. The real good is not the material good, nor is the real bad the material evil, but the spiritual. It has been evidenced by experience that practice of virtue brings about the acquisition by the soul of a tendency and inclination to virtue, and surely this tendency is strengthened if it was there before. The more a man practises virtue under adverse circumstances the greater his perfection. It follows then that when the righteous suffer it is really for their own good, for by this their perfection increases, and their inclination is deepened, which is the real good.¹⁹¹ Crescas does not exclude other

¹⁹⁰ *Millamot*, IV, 6; *Or Adonai*, p. 36 a.

¹⁹¹ זה אמן אחר שנתאמתה הוקומה האומית שהפעלוות יknו תכונה וمرة קבואה בנפש וב"ש שיחקו אותה אם היא קניתה בכביר, וליה יתאמת שהמנוסה בפועל רשות כשיימוד בנסינו הנה כבר קנה שלמות נוספת על שלמותו ואיך שייה הינה הרע שיניע בדרך הזה ואם היה שלא תהיה תכליתו טוב נשמי הנה הוא טוב גמור אחרי שהוא הגמול האמתי והוא הנפשי, *Or Adonai*, p. 37 b.

possibilities such as have been put forth by previous thinkers, as evil occurring to the righteous through ancestral wrongs¹⁹² or other causes. He, however, does not succeed with the other part of the problem, why the wicked prosper. He resorts to the usual methods employed by his predecessors. He remarks, nevertheless, that it is possible that the good of the wicked is for the purpose of spiritual badness, but it does not work out so well as in the first case.

The question of the existence of evil in this world is answered by him, that there is not such a thing in the world. We must observe here that all these philosophers have never reflected upon the natural evil which abounds so much in the external world; they concentrate their discussions upon human events, and though these may arise through natural agencies, yet the question of the wherefore of such agencies of destruction has never been taken up, otherwise they would form a better conception of natural law. Maimonides makes some remarks on the subject attributing evil to the imperfection of matter, but does not treat the problem sufficiently. The bad things that befall the righteous have been shown to be for the purpose of the good, and as for the sufferings of the wicked such a phenomenon from the point of justice cannot be called but good. Crescas here takes up a third question. It has been asked, How can we say that God's providence extends to man? Is it not a belittling of God to speak of Him as being interested in man? In answer to this,

¹⁹² Such a solution of the question was not unknown to the ancient Greeks. The whole trilogy of Oedipus Rex and Antigone by Sophocles is interwoven with that idea. Oedipus and his children suffer through no wrong of their own, but because of the ancient curse on the house of Laius.

Crescas brings out an interesting point in his theory. We have seen, he says, that God through His will is the cause of the existing things and their continual creation. But there is no will in regard to a certain thing unless there is a certain desire or love for the things created by that will. It follows, then, that since there is a love of God for the created things, that those things should be provided no matter what the actual causal relation is, whether mediate or immediate, for the love of God which is strictly connected with His creative will permeates them all, and there is no belittling in saying that God takes interest in man. This love of God to His created things does not lay any special emphasis upon the degree of contemplation the being possesses.¹⁹³ This remark is intended against the Jewish Peripatetics who, as remarked, made speculation an important step in the ladder of Providence. The difference between this kind of love of God, which is ethical, and that of Spinoza's, which is strictly intellectual, has been remarked above.¹⁹⁴ The interesting Spinozistic discussion of evil, which resembles in some point that of Crescas, will be discussed with the question of determinism.

POTENCE.

Since it is evidenced by experience and reason that incapacity is a defect in God, it follows that God's potence is infinite in all respects, in whatever way reason may conceive its existence, though experience may not corroborate it. He is omnipotent, for would He be limited in one way, then beyond that boundary He would be incapable, and this is contrary to the conception we have

¹⁹³ *Or Adonai*, p. 38 a.

¹⁹⁴ Chapter II.

of God. When saying ‘infinite in all respects’, Crescas explains that he means by it the inclusion of several kinds of infinite.¹⁹⁵ There may be, he says, an infinite in time and an infinite in strength, and he emphasizes that God is said to be infinite in both ways. He, however, expresses himself against a blind and extreme conception of omnipotence. As it was mentioned, this infinity of potency is bounded by reason. We cannot, therefore, attribute to God the accomplishment of a logical impossibility, such as the existence of two contraries in one thing at the same time. Such a limitation is really no contradiction to the concept of omnipotent, for the ability to bring about the existence of a thing which cannot be conceived by reason is not included at all by the word potency, and therefore the lack of such potency is not a defect. Likewise, we can affirm that God cannot contradict the first axioms, *המושכלות הראשונות*, for their annulment would imply a concentration of the contraries and such things. He is, however, not bounded by experience; we cannot assert that God cannot do such things as are impossible according to our experience, for as long as reason can possibly conceive it, it is within His sphere of potency.¹⁹⁶

In connexion with his discussion on potency, Crescas makes a few remarks on Aristotle’s proof of the existence of God and the conception of it. Aristotle, he says, has only proved through the eternity of movements the existence of an infinite separate force in time but not in strength. In other words, the God of Aristotle is not perfect. It is true that the force moving the sphere is

¹⁹⁵ ואמנם אמרנו בב”ת מכל האדרין למה שהבב”ת לו ב’ בחינותו ממנו בב”ת בזמנ ומןנו בב”ת בחיק *Or Adonai*, p. 40 b.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

eternal or infinite, but it does not follow that it can move the daily sphere in less than twenty-four hours, and it may be limited by impotency. But the right conception is, he says, that there is no relation between God and the things acted upon, for all determination arises from a certain relation, but when doing away with that relation He is necessarily omnipotent. Crescas goes on to say that the infinite potency in time and strength is not only potential but actual. The attribute of potency is indetermined, for the foundation is only will, and it is this that is meant by infinite, namely, the impossibility of being determined.¹⁹⁷

In comparing the Spinozistic theory of potency with that of Crescas, we notice a striking resemblance not only in conception but also in language. Spinoza, as well as Crescas, conceives God to be omnipotent, and understands by it, at least in formal language, the same thing as Crescas, that 'He decreed things through and purely from the liberty of His will'.¹⁹⁸ It reminds us directly of the closing sentences of the preceding paragraph, where Crescas emphasizes the relation of potency to will and defines God's infinity to consist in the lack of determination, which is exactly what Spinoza means by the liberty of His will.¹⁹⁹ Spinoza also quotes in several places the fact that true things cannot become false by God's potency.²⁰⁰ It is true that the contents of the later (especially in the *Ethics*)

¹⁹⁷ *Or Adonai*, pp. 40 b, 41 a.

¹⁹⁸ 'Nos vero qui iam ostendimus omnia a decreto Dei absolute dependere, dicimus deum esse omnipotentem; at postquam intelleximus cum quaedam decrevit ex mera libertate sue voluntatis, ac deinde eum esse immutabilem,' *Cogitata Metaph.*, Part II, 9.

¹⁹⁹ *Ethics*, Proposition XVII.

²⁰⁰ *Cogitata Metaph.*, *ibid.*, p. 493; *Epistola XLIII.*

Spinozistic conception of omnipotence is considerably different from that of Crescas. The impersonality of it and the mechanical interpretation are too patent to ignore, while Crescas's view is surely a personal one. Crescas has not discussed the question whether God could create another world or a better one than the present, a question which is discussed by Spinoza at great length in *scholia* to propositions XVII and XXXII in his first book of *Ethics*, and to which he gives a negative answer; but from the trend of Crescas's thought it can be inferred that he would be forced, following the logic of his reasoning, to assume a similar view. If, as he insists, God is indeterminate and infinitely perfect, what then prevented Him from creating that other world unless we should attribute to Him imperfection. But Crescas really never followed the logical conclusions to the extreme, but always turned off at an angle (as has been remarked above in Chapter II concerning the unity of God). The same occurred here; he uses his definition of infinite potency rather to prove the possibility of miracles and *creatio ex nihilo*, which really do not follow logically. We shall return to this subject once again.

FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM.

Crescas, in discussing the very important question of free will and determinism, follows his usual method in analysing all the points *pro* and *contra*. The possible (האפשר) exists, for we observe that things have a number of causes, and some of them are cognizable, others are wanting, and it is possible that all the causes exist and possible that some do not exist, and since the causes are only possible then the things themselves are also only possible.

Again, many things are dependent on the human will, and it seems that man is master of himself, he can will them or not. Further, in the *Physics* of Aristotle, there is a classification of events, and in it are included such things as happen by chance and by accident. If there is no existence of the possible, how can we speak of chance and accident? Finally, if the possible does not exist, wherefore all the endeavour and diligence that man displays in his daily occupations, of what avail all the preparations and studies and the expenditure of energy in seeking the right way to his welfare? All these things seem so natural and common to the human nature that a denial of the possible would contradict the fundamental principle of feeling and perception.²⁰¹

On the other side, there are many arguments against the existence of the possible. It was established in the *Physics* that all things which are corruptible come into existence only through four causes. It follows then that, since their immediate causes exist, they must exist by necessity. Again, when we say that a thing is possible of existence, we mean by it that it needs a cause to overbalance the non-existent element. The existence of any possible, then, is necessitated by a preceding cause, and this cause was necessitated by another one, and so on, until we arrive at the first cause. The possible, therefore, does not exist. The subject may be viewed yet from another aspect. It is accepted that whatever is being realized from the potential to the actual needs some external cause to produce it from the state of potentiality to actuality. It follows that, when the human will acts upon something, the will has changed its state from the

²⁰¹ *Or Adonai*, p. 45 b.

potential to the actual. The cause of this change must be external, such as the agreement between the desire and the imagination which is the cause of the will. It is evident, therefore, that when the particular agreement exists the will is necessitated, and if we go on searching we shall discover causes for the arrangement, and so further. On the other hand, we cannot assume that the mover of the will is the will itself; first, that would contradict the principle that a thing being realized from the potential to the actual needs an external cause; secondly, the will would require a preceding will as its cause, and so on to infinity.²⁰² Finally, the possible does not exist on religious ground, for it was accepted that God's science extends to particulars; and if events are possible it would contradict the concept of prescience, for we can hardly call it knowledge when the contrary to it may occur. It follows, then, that there exists a kind of necessity in the order of the world. These are the arguments *pro* and *contra*.²⁰³

Crescas, after reviewing these arguments, comes to the conclusion that the possible exists in some aspects and in some it does not exist. He is, however, more inclined to the deterministic side. He asserts that the possible exists only in regard to itself. In Spinozistic language it means that when attended to itself as an isolated phenomenon it is a possible event, but that when attended to its

²⁰² ונשנאמר בזה שמניע הרצון החוויא הוא הרצון בלבד שהוא הפק החשוב הנה יתחיב מוה אחד מ"ב בטולם אם שייהה הרבר מניע לעצמו והוא הפק החקדמה המוסכם עליה ואם שייהה לרצון רצון קורם יתחיב רצונים וויציאו מן המכ אל הפועל ולרצון הקורם רצון אחר קורם יתחיב רצונים *ביב"ת*, *Or Adonai*, p. 46a.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 47a-b.

causes and viewed in the long chain of causality the event is necessary. He proceeds then to refute the arguments produced on behalf of the possible, even in regard to its causes. The first argument saying that with some things it is possible that all their causes are found, and possible that some do not exist, is simply a *petitio principii*. It is just the possibility of their causes that we seek to establish. The second one that appeals to common sense and for which the fact is adduced that man wills one thing or another, partakes of the same defect, for the theory of necessity asserts that the will must have a cause, and it is one cause that makes him choose one way, and another cause that makes him choose another way, and yet will remains will without strict mechanism, for the will *per se* would probably choose either of the possibilities, but the cause pushes it in one direction; still the will itself does not feel any necessity. The other argument, appealing to everyday facts of endeavour and expenditure of energy, which testify to the existence of the possible, proves only the existence of the possible *per se*, but not in respect to the causes. Nay, even these very endeavours and exertions of energy are causes in the long chain of events that bring about the state of prosperity of the man who displays them; for the causes are not determined or fixed, but can be increased or diminished.²⁰⁴

Similarly, the theory of causal necessity does not find any objection from the religious point of view. The question of the superfluity of precepts and commandments if the events are necessitated, is answered in a manner

²⁰⁴ *Or Adonai*, pp. 47 b, 48 a. Crescas sums up his theory in the following words: ולוֹה הוּא מבוֹאָר שָׁוֵין בְּכָל הַתְּעוּנוֹת שִׁמְצֵד הַעִיוֹן שִׁיחִיב מְצִיאוֹת טָבָע הַאֲפָשָׁר אֶלָּא בְּבַחֲנִית עִצּוֹמוֹת הַדְּבָרִים הַנְּמַצְאִים וְלֹא בְּבַחֲנִית סְבוֹת.

resembling the refutation of the last speculative argument. The precepts and commandments are causes in the long chain of events that lead up to a certain action.²⁰⁵ Reward and punishment, however, seem to form quite an obstacle to the theory, for is it reasonable to speak of being punished or rewarded when there is a kind of necessity pervading human action? Crescas nevertheless is not dismayed, and advances a peculiar hypothesis (we shall find its counterpart in Spinoza): If we look upon reward and punishment as the effects of observing the precepts and their transgressions there is no injustice, just as there is no injustice in the fact that a man is scorched on touching fire, even when that touching is accomplished without any wilful inclination. In short, there is a strict cause and effect necessity which brings about that punishment should follow from one or reward from the other with the same force as any natural phenomenon follows from its cause.²⁰⁶

The view of Crescas on the question of determinism and free will is already apparent though presented in an indirect way. To sum up, events are possible *per se* but necessary through their causes, and the one does not conflict with the other. The potentiality of the primal matter, according to the Aristotelian conception, serves

אבל אם הרבים אפשרים ומהווים בבחינת סבותיהם לא יהיו המצוות והזירות לבטלן אבל לתוכלית חשוב וזה כי יהיו סבות מנויות לדברים אשר הם אפשריים בעצםם במודרגת הסבות *Ibid.*

ואמנם כישתבונן בה אין התרה ממה שיקשה וזה שם הוא הנමול והעונש מתחיבים מהעבוריות והעבירות (העברות perhaps) התחיב המוסכבים מן הסבות הנה לא יאמר בהם הייתם על כדי שאיננו על הקרבנות אל האש שישראל ואמ' והוא קרבתו בזולת רצון, and further in the page ולא יריגשו שהענש נמשך מהעבירות בהמשך המוסב מן הסבות *Or Adonai*, p. 48a.

as an excellent example for Crescas. Matter is potential in assuming various forms in succession, but; in regard to the causes of each form being realized, that form is necessary especially after it was realized. Similarly, in human actions, each action *per se* might have occurred or not, but in regard to the causes that brought about its occurrence it is necessary. However, the publication of such a theory would be a rather dangerous weapon in the hands of the wicked who could not see the necessary consequences entailed by the evil acts. God, therefore, revealed His precepts and prohibitions in order that they should become causes and directors of human actions towards the way leading to human happiness. The foundation of free will (for this is not denied entirely), according to Crescas, lies in the fact that man is ignorant of the real situation or at least does not feel the force of the causal chain. It is because of this that the human will and determination become a factor in the long causal nexus. On the other hand, when man is self-conscious that he has done a certain act against his will, such as when a man is compelled by external forces to commit a certain crime, it follows that no punishment should be meted out to him, at least by legislators, for the self-consciousness of freedom which is a factor in the action, was absent.²⁰⁷ A similar theory of freedom as relating to human consciousness is advanced by Kant.²⁰⁸

As for the relation of future events to prescience, we must admit, says Crescas, that events are not possible in regard to their being known beforehand but in regard to themselves. The science of God is beyond time, His

²⁰⁷ *Or Adonai*, p. 48 a-b.

²⁰⁸ *Metaphysical Foundations of Ethics*, p. 67 and note *ad locum*.

knowledge of the future is like His knowledge of things existing which does not impart an essential necessity to them, for there is still some room for the possible in so far as endeavours and attempts are factors in the decision. But that does not affect the knowledge of God, for in whichever way the event may result He would have known it beforehand.²⁰⁹ We have seen above that this same remark of God's science being above time was as well as the last assertions already advanced by Saadia. The originality in Crescas consists in his conception of the nature of events, and in admitting only a partial kind of freedom, an anticipation which was followed by great philosophers.

Spinoza's view on the question of determinism resembles that of Crescas in a good many ways, especially in its first stage, for in his view there is to be noticed a kind of gradation which is apparent when we compare his earlier writings, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, with his *Ethics*. Spinoza, more than Crescas, must, by the virtue of his whole system, viewing things in a strictly causalistic chain, be a determinist, yet in his early work he attempts a reconciliation between necessity and liberty which looks almost Crescasian, even in language. In *Cogitata Metaphysica* he says:²¹⁰ 'If we attend to our nature, we are free in our actions and deliberate about many things for the sole reason because we wish to. On the other hand, if we attend to the Divine nature we perceive clearly and

²⁰⁹ *Or Adonai*, p. 48 b.

²¹⁰ *Cogitata Metaph.*, Pars I, ch. 3 'Si ad nostram naturam attendamus, nos in nostris actionibus esse liberos, et de multis deliberare propter id solum quod volumus, si etiam ad dei naturam attendamus ut modo ostendimus clare et distincte percipimus, omnia ab ipso pendere, nihilque existere nisi quod ab aeterno a Deo decretum est ut existat.'

distinctly that everything depends upon Him, and nothing exists except that which was eternally decreed by God that it should exist'. He expresses, however, his ignorance to conceive how both necessity and liberty are compatible, and simply says that there are many things that escape human comprehension. Again, in the same work in the second part, Spinoza asserts once more the liberty of man, in spite of his taking cognizance of the causal force which impels the mind to affirm or negate.²¹¹ He does not explain how the thing is accomplished, but in a previous section Spinoza again declares his ignorance.²¹² We see, therefore, that Spinoza grapples with the problem in the same manner as Crescas does, and like him assumes that actions are possible *per se*, and necessary through the causal chain. But we must admit that Spinoza does not carry that principle out with the same consistency as Crescas, and later abandons human freedom entirely, and then again speaks in its name trying to save it at least in a shadowy form.

Fischer insists that even in *Cogitata Metaphysica* Spinoza is already an avowed and thorough determinist, and construes his confession of ignorance in respect to the way human liberty exists in spite of necessity to mean that we conceive that human liberty does not exist.²¹³ He quotes a number of passages to substantiate his view, but in reality these passages do not add more to what is said in the passage quoted where Spinoza makes his confession. All that they show is that Spinoza recognizes the chain of necessity, and that man is a part of nature, but this is also contained in the passage quoted above. On the

²¹¹ *Cogitata Metaph.*, Pars II, ch. 12, p. 503.

²¹² *Ibid.*, ch. 11, p. 500.

²¹³ *Spinoza*, p. 308.

other hand, Fischer fails to explain a fact which decidedly shows that there are two stages in Spinoza's conception of freedom. This is the famous example of Buridan's ass. In his earlier work (*Cogitata Metaphysica*) Spinoza asserts that were a man placed in such an equilibrium of forces to die of hunger, he would not be considered a man but the most stupid donkey.²¹⁴ On the other hand, in the *Ethics*, the same example is quoted, and Spinoza remarks: 'I am quite ready to admit that a man placed in the equilibrium described would die of hunger and thirst. If I am asked whether such a one should not rather be considered an ass than a man, I answer that I do not know'.²¹⁵ *Ethics*, scholium to proposition XLIX. Spinoza agrees with Crescas in the theological question of punishment. The wicked, he says, are punished by a decree of God, and if you ask why they should be punished since they are acting from their own nature, we may reply, Why should poisonous snakes be exterminated?²¹⁶ In his letter to Oldenburg,²¹⁷ a more striking example is given: 'He who goes mad from the bite of a dog is excusable, yet he is rightly suffocated.' This is exactly the same as the saying by Crescas that whoever touches fire must be burned.

²¹⁴ *Cogitata Metaph.*, Pars II, ch. 11 'Quod autem anima tantem potentiam habeat quamvis a nullis rebus externis determinetur commodissime explicari potest exemplo asinae Buridiani. Si enim hominem loco asinae ponamus in tali aequilibrio positum, homo non pro re cogitante sed pro turpissimo asino erit habendus, si fame et site pereat'.

²¹⁵ *Ethics*, scholium to Proposition XLIX.

²¹⁶ *Cogitata Metaph.*, Pars II, ch. 8 'At respondeo etiam ex decreto divino esse ut puniatur et si tantum illi quos non nisi ex libertate fingimus peccare essent puniendi, cur homines serpentes venenosos exterminare conantur, exatura enim propria tantum peccant nec aliud possunt'.

²¹⁷ *Epist. XLI.*

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza becomes an absolute determinist. Man is viewed as a part of nature subject to its laws and regulations,²¹⁸ and free will is openly denied. 'The mind is determined to wish this or that by a cause which has also been determined by another cause, and so on to infinity'.²¹⁹ Yet in spite of all this, Spinoza does not want to give up freedom, and tries to maintain it by all means. The way Spinoza reaches freedom, though different from that of Crescas who makes man's consciousness of freedom a factor in determining human action (a way which was followed by Kant, as indicated above), yet retains the basic Crescasian principle, namely, that human endeavour is a cause in the determination of human act. Spinoza arrives at the conception of freedom mainly through his principle of self-preservation. Everything in so far as it is itself endeavours to persist in its own being, says Spinoza,²²⁰ but the principle itself would not be fruitful unless we emphasize the 'own', namely, the principle of individuality. It is true that man is a part of nature, but a higher part or at least a different part than that of the animal, and as such his essence or his nature must be different in degree from that of the animal or the stone. The persistence of man in his own being will also be different from the persistence of the animal, and this is to be called virtue according to the definition: 'Virtue in so far as it is referred to man is a man's nature or essence, in so far as it has the power of effecting what can only be understood by the laws of that nature'.²²¹ 'This effort for self-preservation is nothing else but the essence of the thing in question', writes Spinoza, 'which in so far as it exists such as it is,

²¹⁸ *Ethics*, IV, p. 4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 1.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 48.

²²¹ Def. VIII, Book III.

is conceived to have force for continuing in existence.²²² It is clear from the foregoing that man does possess a kind of determination and is not merely mechanically acted upon. The idea of self-preservation carries in itself already the conception of a struggle, there is something external which tends to destroy the individual or to pervert it from developing according to its own laws; it is against this external force that the power of self-preservation battles. This is well recognized by Spinoza when he says: 'The force whereby a man persists in existing is limited, and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.'²²³ The term 'infinitely' may probably refer to physical existence, but not to existence according to its own laws, for otherwise it is impossible to conceive how man can ever become free even in the Spinozistic fashion. Hence follows the bondage of man, which means his subjection to emotions and passions the causes of which are external, and do not follow from the laws of his nature.

Where then is the way to freedom? This consists simply in positing against a lower emotion which intends to enslave the activities of man²²⁴ another one, for an emotion can only be controlled or destroyed by another one contrary thereto and with more power.²²⁵ It is here that knowledge comes in as a potent factor, for by means of it man can discern what is useful to him, and so perceive his own being.²²⁶ Ascending in the scale of knowledge, we find that the highest point is to know God, which in other words means to know true nature and its unfoldings, man's own powers included. It follows then that when man reaches that state or is on the path to it that he is

²²² *Ethics*, IV, 26, demon.

²²³ *Ibid.*, III.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 5.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

said to be free, for viewing things under the species of reason,²²⁷ he must necessarily follow the laws of his own nature and avoid things which tend to sway him from that or subject him to bondage. Spinoza goes on to show in detail the way man frees himself; and his ethical conception is evolved through that notion of freedom. But that does not concern us here. What we wish to show is the generation of that freedom, and what it is. To sum up, Spinoza's freedom is not a free-willist's freedom, but a reasonable intrinsic necessity, subject to immutable laws, as against a slavish irrational necessity subject to external causes the results of which tend toward destruction. This human freedom corresponds exactly to that Divine freedom of which Spinoza speaks in his first book, where the main element consists in the absence of external forces coercing it. What interests us mainly in the theory is the recognition of the struggle, and the consideration of the human power as a factor in bringing about the result, the same steps which were taken by Crescas to liberate man and restore to him a part of his lost freedom.

As regards the question of evil, Spinoza gives on that point a clear and more comprehensive explanation than that of Crescas. His view is analogous to that of the Peripatetics who saw in evil a kind of imperfection which cannot be attributed to God but to matter. Spinoza denies entirely the positive existence of evil and error,²²⁸ for in so far as any act of evil expresses reality it is not evil, the badness of it comes only in comparison with another act of more perfection,²²⁹ and so the whole conception of it is only human.²³⁰

²²⁷ *Ethics*, IV, 67.

²²⁸ *Epist. XXIII*, ed. Vloten.

²²⁹ *Epist. XIX*.

²³⁰ *Cogitata Metaph.*, II, ch. 8.

To return to Crescas, he feels that the question of conciliating Divine justice with that of necessity ought to be discussed more thoroughly. He endeavoured to establish the difference between necessity without man being conscious of it, and that where the subject is conscious. It seems, nevertheless, that since reward and punishment are evolved from good and bad acts as effects from causes, there is really no reason for this distinction, for the cause is a cause just the same whether accompanied by consciousness or not. But then the whole foundation of punishment, whether Divine or human, is undermined, for both assume this distinction as their basis.²³¹ Another difficulty is raised by the question of dogmas. Religion requires its adherents to believe in certain dogmas, but what connexion has will with dogma? Crescas produces three arguments against the possibility that will may be a necessary element in belief. First, if will is pre-requisite to belief, then belief does not possess that kind of truth which it claims to possess, for the nature of will carries the possible with it, either man wills to believe or not, and he may also will contrarily in succession; where then is the truth? Secondly, belief implies that a certain thing exists outside of the mind as well as in the mind, and if so what dependence can it have on the will, especially if a certain kind of dogma is necessitated by proofs? It is impossible not to believe it. What foundations have, then, the punitive measures attached to dogmas?²³²

In answer to these questions, Crescas reiterates his doctrine that God's precepts act as causes in determining human actions. Divine righteousness aims at the good

²³¹ *Or Adonai*, p. 49 b.

²³² *Ibid.*

and the perfection of man. The precepts are instituted by God as incitements for good actions, and the rewards and punishments really are evolved from them as effects from causes. But as for the question, why is consciousness necessary in order to receive reward or punishment for the committing of a certain act, it will be answered if we look upon actions in the light of their intensity. The most important ethical quality in doing good is the joy and intensity of pleasure experienced while carrying out the will to do good. God possesses absolute love and intensity of doing good; the human intensity would therefore form a link in the human relation to God. It is evident, therefore, that when this will and intensity are absent, such as when things are committed from conscious necessity, the actions do not entail either reward when they are good or punishment when wrong; for there is also a kind of intensity in doing evil as it is the love and intensity that form important ingredients in the causing of reward and punishment.²³³

In the same light we may solve the question of dogmas. It is true that essentially dogmas are not related to will, but they may be connected in some way. It is not the belief in the dogmas that counts, but the intensity and pleasure which a religious man feels at the believing, or in the endeavour to follow up to the root of the matter. This intensity and pleasure is a matter of will and choice, for a thing may be true and man may conceive it as such

ואמנם ההבדל אשר בין החיוב בזולת הרנש אונס והכרה ובין החיוב אשר בהרגש באונס והכרה הנה הוא הראוי וזה שכבר יתבאר... במקומות מתחלפים שהחכלי המכփ בעבודות ופעולות הטוב והוא החשך והשמחה בהם שאיננו דבר זולת ערבות הרצון לפעול הטוב ולזה היה ראיוי שימוש ממנו הנמול והעוני שבחמשך המוסובב מן הסבה

²³³ *Or Adonai*, p. 47 b.

without experiencing any particular emotion, as, for instance, the fact that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles ; but the knowledge of certain dogmas may be accompanied by the emotion if there is the corresponding exertion. It is from this point of view that reward and punishment are attached to dogmas.²³⁴

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50 a.

(*To be continued.*)